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ABSTRACT

The booklet offers techniques to help language learning disabled college students and their tutors improve test-taking performance. The importance of mastering time management and study skills is stressed. Basic notetaking guidelines are presented, including use of a two-column system so that material on the right may be consolidated and interpreted on the left. An example of such an approach is offered. Use of charts, diagrams, and simple line drawings is discussed, as is the need for continual repetition and drill along with other memory aids. Suggestions for better test performance focus on the following test types: true-false, multiple choice, matching questions, sentence completion, and essays. Examples of each type are offered along with recommended approaches to the type of test. Key words in essay questions are listed and explained. Students are advised to proofread answers before turning tests in and to review patterns of errors on returned tests so as to better direct their study habits for future exams. (CL)

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Postsecondary Intervention Model for Learning Disabilities
The Barkley Memorial Center
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

TEST PREPARATION AND TEST TAKING TECHNIQUES

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EC 200486

Study Manual #1
August, 1985

For PS IM LD:

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TEST PREPARATION AND TEST TAKING TECHNIQUES

I. Introduction

Preparing for and taking tests often prove to be keen sources of anxiety for college students. The language learning disabled (LLD) student is frequently even more anxious than his peers because of the additional difficulties s/he faces due to the handicapping condition. The pages that follow present another look, "a new look," at standard test-preparation and test-taking techniques to help provide the LLD college student with more efficient ways of adapting commonly accepted learning techniques to his/her unique learning situation. These techniques will be reviewed and reconsidered specifically in the light of the LLD student's special needs. Attention will be directed to the student's choices and activities before, during, and after a testing situation.

II. Before

Students often segment their study tasks; that is, they tend to meet their daily and weekly reading assignments, and then, ultimately, gather their courage, and proceed to prepare for The Big One - a test! An alternative way of perceiving these tasks is to join them. Preparing for evaluation should, optimally, begin the day the student selects a specific course and considers its relevance and importance to his/her entire academic plan. Talking with other students, visiting with the professor, leafing through the syllabus and/or catalog - all help to establish an early mind set or pattern appropriate to that particular academic subject. These study tasks should not be thought of as being segments that culminate in an exam, but instead perceived as being united on a continuum. That this goal has been achieved will be evident in the student's comfortable mastery of the prescribed content; of a given college

course, mastery that has been attained with competence, ease, and with a comfortable sense of order.

It is to be assumed that there is some order in the courses which the student selects and in the sequence in which these are taken. Furthermore, it is assumed that each student tries to create some order in his/her own life and in the balance of time s/he chooses to spend in study, in paid employment, and in relaxation. The need for order is also an essential component of one's study skills; that is, a student cannot expect to find patterns and a logical order in the materials s/he studies unless s/he is able to approach these materials in a systematic and orderly manner.

PS IM LD recommends that before the student proceeds further with test preparation and test-taking strategies, s/he take time to study both the time management and the SQ5R study skills sections in Part A of the PS IM LD Handbook. The project considers a reasonable mastery of these two areas to be core components of each student's battery of test-preparation techniques.

Once the student and the project tutor are comfortable with the approach to time management and study skills, they should begin together to review the LLD student's method of note-taking — both notes from lectures and notes from texts. The project heartily endorses a two-column system of note-taking. Walter Pauk (1984), Richard Gallagher (McCutcheon, 1984) and others recommend that notes be taken ONLY on the right-hand two-thirds of the page. The student should save the entire left-hand third so that the material on the right may be consolidated and interpreted on the left. This interpretation of factual information may take the form of subject headings, key vocabulary terms, or the student's own summary of the material on the right. It may even serve to integrate visually the "new knowledge" into the student's unique fund of previously acquired information. But, most importantly, the purpose of the

narrow column on the left is to augment, to clarify, and to foster recall of the basic factual material adjoining.

Please study the example below taken from Walter Pauk's How to Study in College (1984), one of the books endorsed by PS IM LD in the concluding list of Recommended References.

Note the following features in the example given above:

1. The paper is clearly divided into the larger factual side and the smaller key idea, recall, interpretation side.

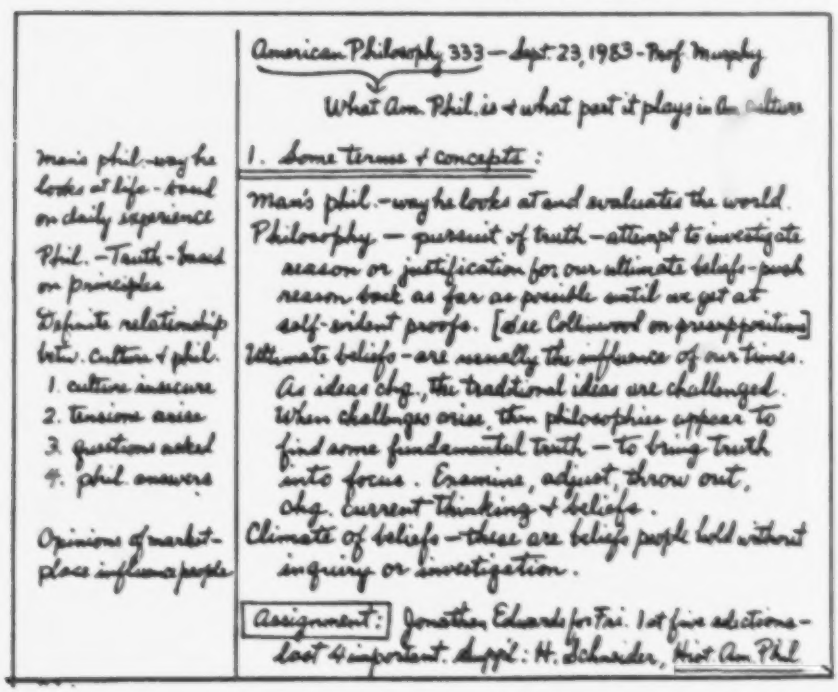
2. The "visual message" of the notes is clear and uncluttered with headings and sub-headings clearly delineated.

3. The "Assignment" is set off from the balance of the material - and, hopefully, is re-written on a separate assignment page or calendar.

4. The material recorded on the left refers either to key points or to questions posed in the lecture, to important vocabulary, persons, dates, or events noted in the lecture, or is the student's own interpretation of any of these.

5. A short, concise summary is included on the bottom of the student's notes, which he continues to his next page.

Lecture Notes in the Cornell System: Topics, paragraphs, and summary



American Philosophy 333 — Sept 23, 1983 - Prof Murphy

What Am. Phil. is & what part it plays in Am. culture

1. Some terms & concepts:

man's phil - way he looks at life - based on daily experience

Phil. - Truth - based on principles

Definite relationship betw. Culture & phil.
1. culture insecure
2. tensions arise
3. questions asked
4. phil. answers

Opinions of market-place influence people

Man's phil. - way he looks at and evaluates the world.

Philosophy — pursuit of truth - attempt to investigate reason or justification for our ultimate beliefs - push reason back as far as possible until we get at self-evident proofs. [see Collingwood on presupposition]

Ultimate beliefs - are usually the influence of our times. As ideas chg., the traditional ideas are challenged. When challenges arise, then philosophies appear to find some fundamental truth — to bring truth into focus. Examine, adjust, throw out, chg. current thinking & beliefs.

Climate of beliefs — these are beliefs people hold without inquiry or investigation.

Assignment: Jonathan Edwards for Fri. 1st five selections - last 4 important. Suppl.: H. Schneider, Hist Am Phil

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Any student can easily apply the note-taking technique demonstrated here to record class and lecture notes and to coordinate and integrate these with notes from outside reading assignments. Periodically, during the course of the semester and, most importantly, of course, directly before a test, the student can then examine the two-column composite to find meaning, sequences, and appropriate classifications in the total body of knowledge that is to be mastered. Furthermore, the relative success or difficulty the student has interpreting and classifying notes can serve to identify for both the LLD student and the project tutor specific areas in which they need to take action together to strengthen the student's understanding. Having a workable two-column note-taking system as an element in one's own matrix of study skills, should contribute to a feeling of increasing familiarity with course contents. What was once foreign and strange will have become integrated as a comfortable part of the student's accepted body of knowledge.

An additional study aid that all students should keep in their "bag of tricks" is the frequent use of charts, diagrams, and simple line drawings. Any kind of visual schematic representation that can be copied or, better yet, created by a student may well serve as an aid to better understanding and more effective recall. Pictorial representations of study materials, showing relationships, clusters, or similarities in meaning provide serious students effective study aids. Simple charts that show grammatical verb forms, pages of musical notation, timelines, graphs, daily calendars, color wheels, and even clocks are examples of common visual schemes. The LLD student and the project tutor should practice together creating many visual study aids such as the one below from the student's own course requirements.

For example:

The Instruments of the Orchestra (Ewen, 1959)

Section	Higher Pitch	Lower Pitch	Lowest Pitch
The Strings	Violins 1 and 2	Viola	Cellos Bass violin
The Woodwinds	Piccolo, flute	Oboe, clarinet	Bass clarinet English horn
The Brasses	Trumpet, coronet	French horn	Trombone, tuba
The Percussion	Triangles Chimes Xylophone	Snare drum	Bass drum Kettle drum

And, lastly, one should not forget the importance of continual repetition and drill as memory aids - as well as the liberal use of mnemoric devices or jingles for that same purpose.

For example:

Most of us remember catchy verses such as "Thirty days hath September, April, June and November." Similarly, many students remember that "stationery" is spelled with an "ery" because its ending is similar to that of "paper," or that the person who directs the learning activities in a school is the "principal" - a real pal to the students there. Devices such as these are not merely jingles; they deserve students' serious consideration as appropriate aids to memory.

The test preparation techniques discussed above are really no different from what people do when they learn anything new - whether that be riding a bicycle, planning a party, becoming familiar with a new job, or learning to live in a strange city. We classify and reclassify, list and interpret, practice and drill, analyze and then synthesize - all in an effort to cause a

new task to become understandable and manageable. The comfortable mastery of these techniques, along with careful attention to diet, rest, and exercise, also helps to combat normal cases of pre-exam "jitters." Many college professors encourage the use of specific study strategies for students in their classes and often welcome the opportunity to discuss these during or after normal class hours.

III. During

Assuming the student has effectively prepared for a test in successive and increasingly rigorous stages over the course of many weeks, s/he should then be able to walk into the exam room armed with confidence as well as with knowledge. One clever professor (McCutcheon, 1984) has remarked that:

> "It's not how much you know that counts, but how well you use what you do know."

Of course, college students are required to "know" quite a bit and to give evidence of that knowledge on a frequent and on-going basis. But, how a student shows what he knows on a particular test or exam is affected not only by the professor giving the exam, but also by the particular type or format of the tests being given. In general, it is usually a good idea to pass through all tests once to answer quickly all questions that have obvious or easy answers. That leaves a balance of time for the "sticky questions" that are left. Please examine the differing approaches used when taking the following types of tests:

True-False
Multiple Choice
Matching Question
Sentence Completion
Essay

True-False Tests

Definition of: In their simplest, most readily understandable form, these merely make statements. The student must then decide whether each statement is true or not true and, therefore, false. Note: Unless the scoring pattern indicates that "guessing" would be unwise, it may often be a good idea to risk making an "educated guess" when answering a particularly ambiguous question.

Approach to: Truth is an absolute in this type of exam. If a statement is almost true, then it must not be labeled "true," but rather "false." Watch out for qualifiers such as:

all	is	every	equal
none	isn't	never	always

and others such as:

most	greater than	usually	frequently
some	less than	seldom	only

These generally change the meaning of a sentence, and the student, particularly the LLD student, should be aware of this.

For example:

"College studies are difficult for most students" is essentially a true statement. But "college studies are difficult for all students" is not necessarily true and so would be marked false.

Similarly, "UNL wins many of its football games" is likely to be marked "true". But, an answer of "false" would be put next to "UNL wins all of its football games," since the student has no way of really knowing whether or not this will always be so. Remember: The entire statement must be totally true for the answer to be marked "true." Otherwise, the student must answer "false."

Multiple-Choice Tests

Definition of: A statement is made and purposely left incomplete. The student is then required to choose between four to five more or less appropriate endings. If the test is well-constructed, only one of these endings is correct, and the rest are considered decoys.

Approach to: Always read the instructions carefully. As in the True-False type of test, the placement of one word can easily change the meaning of the statement. Read each incomplete sentence (stem) and all of the options which follow it. Cross out obvious wrong choices immediately, and then use your best judgment to complete the task of making the appropriate selection(s). And, of course, be sure that the selection(s) made do refer to the subject matter of the course being tested. Also, the student should be aware that an acceptable answer might be for more than one of the choices, or even none of the choices to be selected. These are all considered to be reasonable options in this type of test.

Again, let's consider some examples:

1) College students often enjoy

a) movies.
b) parties.
c) concerts.
d) all of the above.

Of course, the answer is "d." But if "final exams" were included instead of one of the other options, the student might have looked for an answer that specified only some of the above - rather than all of the above.

2) Chevrolet, Ford, and BMW are terms that generally refer to

a) animals.
b) people.
c) cars.
d) machines.

Of course, "c" is correct for #2. The choice between "cars" and "machines" is confusing; but "cars" remains the most accurate option given. And, unless the directions indicate differently, the student must arrive at the one best choice.

Remember that the careful student will always read cautiously to be aware of negatives and other qualifiers. In example #1, if the phrase had read "College students never enjoy --", we would then have looked for a different type of answer.

Matching Questions Tests

Definition of: Two vertical lists of related terms are placed side-by-side. The phrases in one are to be matched with the most appropriate word in the other.

Approach to: The student should cross off each choice as it's made and entered in the appropriate blank. S/he should be careful to make the most appropriate choice after considering all the options in the column. Be aware that test makers often create lists of uneven size to further test students' abilities to select the perfect answer!

For example:

Job		Task
_____ Plumber	a.	To do office work.
_____ Electrician	b.	To provide health care.
_____ Physician	c.	To repair water pipes.
_____ Secretary	d.	To provide security
_____ Guard	e.	To maintain wiring
_____ Dermatologist	f.	To paint homes

Of course, any student responds best when s/he is certain of the answer being requested. But, in the absence of certainty, "educated guessing" is encouraged!

Sentence-Completion Tests

Definition of: The student is given a statement containing one or more blanks. He must then fill in those blanks with the appropriate words or phrases to make the statement complete.

Approach to: As usual, the student must read both the directions and the statement that s/he is to complete very carefully, taking a moment to make certain that the information being given is exactly what has been requested. Then the student can feel free to fill in the blanks(s) with the correct number of items required. Watch for clues in the context of the "stem" to indicate the answer(s) that is to be chosen. Sometimes these clues are grammatical and often they're syntactical; that is, they're contained in the basic meaning and structure of the sentence itself.

For example:

1) The four basic seasons of a calender year are _____, _____, _____, and _____.

2) After completing four years of undergraduate education at college, most students expect to receive a _____.

3) Thomas Edison was a notable American inventor whose chief contributions are generally considered to be _____.

In #1 and #2, the student quickly realizes how many specific answers are required. In #3, s/he must exercise some judgment, but should probably plan to include more than one invention - judging from the use of the plural marker "s" at the end of "contribution," the use of the word "are" instead of "is," and the inclusion of a relatively lengthy blank line.

Essay Tests

Definition of: A well-constructed essay test requires that a student demonstrate both a mastery of specific knowledge and the ability to organize

and use that knowledge. Essay response requires that the student be able to write deliberately ordered, complete sentences. Of course, it is understood that nothing can replace a firm grasp of the essential information required to answer any question, but, in an essay test format, how the student constructs that answer will certainly have an impact on how well it is evaluated by the instructor!

Approach to: As usual, the student should read all of the directions carefully, making notes to aid recall when s/he begins to write. S/he should plan the answers carefully on a separate sheet of paper, if allowed, or in the margin of the exam paper, so that these answers deal specifically with the material being requested in a well-organized and logical manner. The student must be very much aware of any time constraints as s/he begins to organize and compose these answers. And, most importantly, students should always answer each question precisely in the manner in which it was asked. List and describe, compare and contrast, show cause and effect, and list chronologically all require different responses.

Let us return to the description of orchestral instruments represented in chart form in the preceding pages to see how we might briefly treat such a portrayal in an essay test.

To list and describe: All the student needs to do is simply list each of the instruments and then tell briefly how each of those instruments differs in appearance and purpose. That's not too complicated!

To compare and contrast: The student would again list the instruments, but would probably group them according to the manner in which their sound is produced in order to show valid reasons for each instrument's unique contribution in a modern orchestra.

To show cause and effect: The student would probably delve deeply into the actual mechanics of sound production to demonstrate clearly how the

physical construction of each instrument actually causes its singular sound to be produced.

To list chronologically: The student would need to have researched the history of the orchestral instruments in order to know both the approximate time of the invention or appearance of each instrument and the order in which that appearance was reported in history.

These are but four examples of the kinds of essay questions with which students commonly come into contact. Please study and save the chart below which shows many of the key words in essay questions along with the specific meaning of each term.

KEY WORDS IN ESSAY QUESTIONS

Key Word	Explanation
Apply a principle	Show how a principle works, through an example.
Comment	Discuss briefly.
Compare	Emphasize similarities, but also present differences.
Contrast	Give differences only.
Criticize	Give your judgment of good points and limitations, with evidence.
Define	Give meanings, but no details.
Demonstrate	Show or prove an opinion, evaluation, or judgment.
Describe	State the particulars in detail.
Diagram	Show a drawing with labels.
Differentiate	Show how two things are different.
Discuss	Give reasons pro and con, with details.
Distinguish	Show main differences between two things.
Enumerate	List the points.
Evaluate	Discuss advantages and disadvantages with your opinion.
Explain	Give reasons for happenings or situations.
Give cause and effect.	Describe the steps that lead to an event or situation.
Give an example.	Give a concrete example from your book or experience.
Identify	List and describe.
Illustrate	Give an example.
Interpret	State the meaning in simpler terms, using your judgment.
Justify	Prove or give reasons.
List	List without details.
Outline	Make a short summary with headings and subheadings.
Prove	Give evidence and reasons.
Purpose	How something fulfills an overall design.
Relate	Show how things interconnect.
Relationship	Connection between events, the linkage.
Review	Show main points or events in summary form.
Show	List your evidence in order of time, importance, logic.
Solve	Come up with a solution based on given facts or your knowledge.
State	List main points briefly without details.
Summarize	Organize and bring together the main points only.
Support	Back up a statement with facts and proof.
Trace	Give main points from beginning to end of an event.

Finally, the student should keep the following in mind during any exam:

- Of course, be well-rested and well-prepared.
- Try to maintain a calm, relaxed "I can handle it" attitude.
- Stick to the task at hand, keeping body and eye focus on the exam.
- In case of "sticky," unplanned-for questions, the student should try to:
    - Visualize the correct answer on the appropriate page of his/her notes.
    - Think of ideas and topics related to the problem area.
    - See if any other items on the test refers to the topic in question and can, perhaps, help to "trigger" the correct answer from the student's memory.
    - Take an "educated guess," if the situation seems appropriate.

IV. After the Exam

After any exam, time permitting, the student should ALWAYS carefully proofread all responses before turning in the completed exam to the professor. Errors do occur, and it never hurts to find these before the instructor does! The student should not only re-read all answers, but also should re-read all directions and questions, too, in order to ascertain that s/he has fully complied with the purpose of each item on the test.

When an exam has been returned, any student, and particularly the LLD student, should note where errors did occur and should look for patterns in these errors in order to better direct his/her study habits for future exams. Professors and lab assistants are generally pleased to review test responses with their students, too. This "after-check" then becomes another valid step in the test preparation continuum discussed earlier. It also provides a helpful guide for the LLD student and the project tutor in the interim between exams and should help to counterbalance any pre-exam "jitters" before the next test. The student should plan to also return to the course text and lecture

notes to highlight information that was covered on the test and to be certain that s/he is comfortable with the way that information was handled on the test.

V. Conclusion

The PS IM LD staff has compiled the notes above to aid project students and their tutors in their common efforts in learning to approach test-taking situations with increased comfort, power, and skill. It is hoped that it will be used frequently and with beneficial results!

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LIST OF RECOMMENDED STUDENT RESOURCES

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Rutherford, R. D. (1982). Just in Time, J. Wiley and Sons, New York.

Software: The Bank Street Writer and Bank Street Speller are both recommended, along with other applicable PS IM LD software, to increase writing proficiency.